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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003386

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [KJUS](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: INTERPRETING FORMER PRIME MINISTER THAKSIN'S
DIVORCE

REF: A. BANGKOK 3280 (THAKSIN ADDRESSES RALLY)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3167 (THAKSIN CONVICTED)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2427 (THAKSIN FLEES ABROAD)
[1](#)D. BANGKOK 2327 (POTJAMAN CONVICTED)
[1](#)E. BANGKOK 2243 (THAKSIN PREDICTS LIFE ABROAD)
[1](#)F. BANGKOK 1290 (DINNER WITH THAKSIN)
[1](#)G. 07 BANGKOK 3276 (FROZEN ASSETS)
[1](#)H. 07 BANGKOK 2280 (WINAI ON POLITICS)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason: 1.4 (b and d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) A spokesman for former Prime Minister Thaksin told the media that Thaksin and his wife, Potjaman, divorced in Hong Kong on November 14. Most Thais believe the divorce was driven by tactical considerations. An advisor to the Prime Minister told the Ambassador that Thaksin now "can go full speed ahead" in his political efforts, which have become more aggressive in recent days. There has long been widespread, credible speculation about Thaksin having extra-marital affairs, which may also have been a factor.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: The simplest explanation for the divorce may be the most reasonable. There likely was more than a grain of truth to the stories of Thaksin's philandering, and the stress of life as a fugitive abroad may also have taken a toll on Thaksin's marriage. That said, we do not doubt that Thaksin and Potjaman will attempt to take whatever advantages they can from their divorce, which might prevent property in Potjaman's name from being seized by the state if Thaksin is convicted in corruption cases proceeding in civil court. Whatever factors underlay the divorce, Thaksin's political efforts have become more aggressive recently, and, although recent royal cremation rites provided a pause in the strife, reconciliation between the pro- and anti-Thaksin camps seems a distant prospect. End Summary and Comment.

DIVORCE IN HONG KONG

[1](#)3. (C) November 14-16 funeral rites for Princess Galyani

Vadhana, King Bhumibol's elder sister, drew tens of thousands of Thai mourners; political rhetoric cooled somewhat, the local media reported extensively on Galyani's life, and a majority of Thais on the streets dressed in the mourning colors of black, grey and white. While the funeral was without question the local media's lead story, the clear runner-up was the divorce of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his wife, Potjaman. According to Thaksin's Bangkok-based spokesman, the couple signed divorce documents at the Thai Consulate in Hong Kong on November 14. On November 15, the Ambassador, attending a cremation ceremony for the Princess, spoke with an advisor in the Office of the Prime Minister, who assessed the divorce as a purely tactical maneuver. The advisor said that Potjaman, having severed her legal tie to Thaksin, would now have more flexibility to address her own financial and legal concerns, including her appeal of a Criminal Court conviction for tax evasion (ref D). The advisor said that Thaksin now "can go full speed ahead" in furtherance of his political agenda, without concern for the impact his activities may have on his wife or children.

¶4. (SBU) Note: Potjaman was allowed to post bail after her tax evasion conviction; her flight abroad -- ref C -- appeared to be in anticipation of a conviction in the separate Ratchadapisek land case, in which she wound up acquitted, though Thaksin was convicted -- ref B. It is unclear whether Potjaman's flight from prosecution in the latter case would prompt her detention should she return to Thailand.

¶5. (C) Separately, a senior Thai diplomat also confirmed to the Ambassador that the Shinawatras divorced in Hong Kong; the senior diplomat told the Ambassador that he shared the

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widespread assumption that the divorce was driven by legal and political concerns. Numerous pundits have speculated that the divorce may help protect some of the couple's assets (whichever ones can be determined to be the separate property of Potjaman) against seizure in the event of adverse court rulings against Thaksin. Recently, a member of Thaksin's legal team told us that new civil court cases relating to alleged corruption are proceeding against Thaksin; unlike criminal cases, civil cases can be initiated while the defendant is in absentia. Most of the couple's assets in Thailand remain frozen since mid-2007 (ref G).

ON THE POLITICAL OFFENSIVE

¶6. (C/NF) The divorce comes in the midst of intensifying political activity by Thaksin. On November 1, he addressed (by phone) a rally of his supporters in Bangkok, making remarks that some considered inflammatory and potentially damaging to the King (ref A). Thaksin subsequently promised publicly to identify his principal adversaries by name, prompting further concern by his opponents about the possibility of attacks on the monarchy. Thaksin may have a greater incentive to try to bring about political change in Thailand following the recent revocation of his and Potjaman's UK visitor's visas, which left the couple without a known place of abode. (Note: Some press speculation indicated that the divorce might facilitate Potjaman's return to London; however, we understand that Potjaman's ineligibility for a British visa is based on her conviction for tax evasion, not on her family tie to Thaksin. End Note.)

¶7. (C) By all accounts, Potjaman actively participated in decisions concerning government resources during Thaksin's time in office, from 2001-06. Now, however, there are indications that the couple's marriage may have been strained by his post-coup determination to be involved in politics, against her wishes. In April 2007, a leading General told the then-Ambassador that Thaksin had written in a letter to the King that he would stay out of politics, at least in part

because Potjaman would divorce him were he to return to political life (ref H). During an April 2008 dinner hosted by the Ambassador (ref F), Thaksin, in his wife's presence, alluded to Potjaman's desire that he quit politics, in part because of the severe strain it was putting on their marriage. He even joked that his wife had threatened to leave him if he didn't pull completely out of politics. Thaksin made the same claim to the Ambassador again in a private meeting at the Residence in July (ref E), although absent the humorous tone.

18. (C) The Shinawatras' marriage has long been under stress, according to multiple contacts. After the couple returned from abroad in early 2008, a leading Democrat Party official told us of discord between the two, saying that they maintained separate residences in Bangkok. A Thaksin associate confirmed to us months ago that the couple -- then in Thailand -- no longer slept under the same roof, but our contact attributed that to security concerns rather than to marital friction. During the November 15 cremation ceremonies, the Ambassador's wife spoke with Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat's wife, Yaowapa (sister of Thaksin), who seemed genuinely distressed by news of the divorce. (Note: Tales of marital discord may resonate with Yaowapa; recently, anti-government figures publicly released video footage of Somchai in the company of an unidentified young woman and implied that the two were romantically linked. End Note.)

CREDIBLE RUMORS OF PHILANDERING

19. (C) When Thaksin was in London in the period between the 2006 coup and the 2007 election, he openly cavorted with a 20-year-old Thai singer named Saanrat Wisutthithadato, aka "Lydia." Speculation about the nature of this relationship led the singer to deny publicly that the two were having affair. Previously, widespread rumors also alleged that

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Thaksin fathered the youngest child of Thai Rak Thai politician Sudarat Keyuraphan, and that he impregnated former Thai Rak Thai legislator Nahathai Thewphaignarm, who felt compelled to abort the pregnancy after a confrontation with Potjaman. Nahathai held a tearful press conference to deny the alleged pregnancy and the relationship.

JOHN